

SURVIVAL MEAT PRESERVING - PART 2, JERKY

MAKING JERKY

Modern store bought jerky is not real jerky. It is too thin, too small, too soft, and is often preserved with chemicals. Real homemade jerky is thicker, longer, and very stout! It is tough! To eat real jerky, you "worry" off a chunk with your teeth -- if you can -- or cut off a "flake" with a pocket knife, then soak the "flake" in your cheek for awhile until it finally softens. If jerky isn't that tough, it won't keep!

Meat for jerky is prepared from lean, trimmed strips about 1 1/2" by 1/2", and as long as practical. Normally the larger muscles are cut into jerky, and are cut with the grain rather than across it as for steaks. All tendons, gristle, fat, etc, that can be removed should be trimmed off. The meat strips are then lightly powdered with coarse, freshly ground pepper (if available) to keep away flies, and lightly salted to help with taste and salt craving. Once prepared, the pepper can be brushed off the iron like chucks easily, if desired.

The meat strips should be dried in the sun about four (4) feet above a slow fire. Non resinous hardwoods should be used for the fire, and the flames kept very low. The smoke from the fire is to keep away birds and flies, NOT used for drying the meat! Use a low fire, with little flame or heat. Green hardwood works fine, but resinous softwoods such as Douglas fir will impart a bad taste to the jerky. Fruit woods (except wild cherry) impart a nice, mild taste to the jerky.

The drying rack can be made from forked sticks pounded into the ground, and the cross sticks that hold the meat made from thin, green wood such as willow or vine maple. A sharpened end on the cross stick should be pushed through one end of the meat strips, which will allow them to hang down. Allow at least an inch of separation between meat strips. The cross sticks may be carried indoors if rain threatens, and at night to protect from dew. Do not dry in the sun before 9:00 in the morning, or after 6:00 at night to avoid getting dew on the meat. Just the dew from a single morning may saturate the meat sufficiently to require an additional day of drying time!

USING JERKY

Jerky can be used as is, always having a little flake in the pouch, or cooked in stews. If cooked, it is best to soak the jerky overnight prior to use, then slice across the grain into chunks before cooking. If possible, fat should be added to the stew, as well as tubers and corn meal. If any mold on the meat is detected, it can be washed off before use with vinegar.

Really hard jerky will keep for a long time, but should be stored in a dry place. If you live in an area of high humidity or frequent rains, the jerky can be stored by using the same techniques listed previously for pemmican.

DRYING METHODS CONCLUSION

As you can see, preparing dried meat products requires the expenditure of lots of energy -- yours! Cutting and stripping the meat, cutting the hardwood and hauling it to the racks, keeping the fire going, bringing in the racks at night, etc, does require time, but it is certainly not hard work. If you have the meat available to make large batches, your effort per piece is reduced considerably.

In a real survival situation, without electricity for refrigeration or freezing, a large supply of meat can best be preserved by drying or smoking. The alternative is to do without, and that is a poor alternative indeed.